United Nations

Press Release

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General consults with Permanent Representatives of Iraq, France, United Kingdom, United States on Iraqi request for United Nations to take over allied refugees camps in northern part of country.

- World Health Organization reports more than 177,000 new cholera cases in 12 countries.

- United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission is reinforced by peace-keepers arriving from Lebanon and Cyprus.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, commenting last night on the refugee situation in Northern Iraq, told correspondents he hoped the announced initiative from Baghdad to seek an arrangement with the Kurds would solve the humanitarian problems.

Asked if the United Nations was moving fast enough to meet the needs of the refugees, the Secretary-General said the Organization was moving as fast as it could and was constantly in touch with the humanitarian agencies both in Geneva and New York. He added that he would appoint Michael Priestley to be the coordinator in New York, in the same way he had appointed Sadruddin Aga Kahn to be based in Geneva and Bernt Bernander in Baghdad.

Questioned about the Iraqi request for the United Nations to take over allied refugee camps, the Secretary-General said he was considering the request and had been meeting with the Ambassadors of France, the United Kingdom and the United States to discuss the matter. He said he was scheduled to meet with the Iraqi Ambassador today, and that everybody had agreed, in principle, on the Iraqi notion.

In a related development, Iraq repeated yesterday its complaint that United States and other foreign troops were violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity by conducting relief operations and using helicopters to land military forces in the country.

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In a letter to the Secretary-General, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Ahmed Hussein, asked the United Nations to take immediate action to assume its functions of providing relief at the American camps in accordance with the agreement reached on 18 April.

Meanwhile, a United Nations official said today that the Organization would be sending a team of about 30 international experts to the northern part of Iraq over the weekend.

The experts were drawn from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Volunteers (UNV), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The team would carry with it cargo of supplies from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as well as UNHCR radio equipment.

The official said the Executive Delegate's representative in Baghdad was in northern Iraq now to look at possible sights for humanitarian centres. A convoy of UNICEF supplies from Baghdad and a UNHCR convoy coming from Turkey, headed by Steffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Executive Delegate, was expected to arrive at the affected areas as soon as possible.

In related news, the European Economic Community (EEC) announced yesterday that it is ready to set up camps for Iraqi refugees in Iraqi territory.

In a communique, the EEC delegation to the United Nations said its aid had financed relief operations in neighbouring Turkey and Iran only. It said the EEC member countries which had military personnel on the spot had been contacted to assess humanitarian needs for future aid in Iraq.

The EEC relief operations, under way since early April, have been made possible by a $178 million emergency donation.

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The World Health Organization (WHO) said today that as of mid-April, it had received reports of over 177,000 new cases of cholera in 12 countries. Five of these countries -- Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru -- accounted for 78 per cent of the total number of cases and for over 1,200 deaths. Those countries had never reported cholera in this century.

The WHO estimated that in Latin America alone, between 90 million and 120 million people were now at risk because of a lack of access to safe water, safe food and adequate sanitation.

To meet the challenges, the WHO announced that its Director-General, Hiroshi Nakajima, had set up a Global Cholera Control Task Force at its headquarters in Geneva to coordinate the agency's global action with regard to cholera control. Made up of WHO experts in disease surveillance, case

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management, water and sanitation, food safety, emergency intervention and information and education, the team will work in cooperation with the WHO regional office.

The WHO said that most cholera cases could be adequately treated by administering a solution of oral rehydration salts. It said that during an epidemic outbreak, 80 to 90 per cent of patients could generally be treated by oral rehydration alone.

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In an update on the situation of the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), a United Nations official said today that the total strength of the force was now 321, consisting of 113 military observers and 208 members of support units, including 150 Canadian engineers.

He said 222 personnel on loan from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) were proceeding towards the area in a convoy across the desert. They had arrived at the Saudi/Jordanian border today and were expected in Kuwait tomorrow or Saturday. Another 200 members of UNIFIL had been flown into Kuwait and the rest would arrive today.

Meanwhile, from the United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), 35 Danes and 35 Austrians had left Cyprus this morning by air and were expected to arrive in Kuwait later today, he said. The remaining 160 to be called in from UNFICYP were expected to arrive by air no later than Saturday. The two Swiss aircraft committed to the Force were in place, he said, while a Chilean helicopter was expected in the area on Monday.

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